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| |  | | --- | | [Hatshepsut depicted as a female](javascript:launchHat1()) | |  |   **As pharaoh, Hatshepsut (reigned from c1479 - 1458 BC)was different - she was a woman. Customarily Egyptian culture restricted kingship to men, but Hatshepsut's determination and cunning silenced her enemies and enhanced her reputation.**  Ancient Egyptian society gave[women](http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/newkingdom/women_power.html) far more respect than most other societies of the time . But it was still extremely unusual for a woman to become [pharaoh](http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/newkingdom/pharaohs.html).   **A man's world**  Despite their relatively high status, many thought that it was fundamentally wrong for a woman to rule. So Hatshepsut had to spend her reign securing her position and fighting to be seen as a legitimate ruler.   After the death of her father, Tuthmosis I, Hatshepsut became queen to Tuthmosis II, her half-brother. After he died, power passed to her stepson, [Tuthmosis III](http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/newkingdom/tuthmosis3.html), while he was still a small boy.   **A grab for power** Hatshepsut became co-regent, ruling with others on behalf of her stepson until he grew up. This was standard practice, but Hatshepsut then surprised everyone by grabbing sole power for herself and declaring herself Pharaoh - just the third woman to be pharaoh in 3,000 years.   At first, Hatshepsut's move was very unpopular. To persuade her people, Hatshepsut stressed her royal ancestry and claimed that her father had publicly appointed her as his successor.   |  | | --- | | [Hatshepsut depicted as a male](javascript:launchHat()) | |  |   **Telling tales** She also relied heavily on propaganda. On her temple walls she ordered carvings that told how the god Amen had taken on her father's appearance on the day she was conceived. This effectively made Hatshepsut the daughter of the chief of all Egyptian gods.   Then Hatshepsut made sure that she was portrayed in pictures as a man, with a male body and even a false beard. Finally, she replaced her husband and father's old courtiers with new supporters, so if she went, they went too.   **Family problems** Despite these efforts, Hatshepsut was still worried about her position. In particular, she had to deal with her army, which was led by her stepson (and rightful pharaoh), Tuthmosis. She had a dilemma: if she led them into battle and lost, she would be blamed and could lose power. If her army won the battle, Tuthmosis would get all the credit and she could lose power.   Hatshepsut was nothing if not cunning, and she devised a win-win solution. She ordered the army to make itself useful, not by going into battle, but by setting off on a trading expedition to the land of Punt, where no Egyptian had been for more than 500 years.   **A cunning plan** The expedition had a double advantage: it would keep her army busy so that Tuthmosis posed no danger to her. It also offered Hatshepsut the chance to bring back to Egypt a wide variety of valuable and exotic goods, such as ivory, leopard skins and incense.   |  | | --- | | [Expedition to Punt depcited on temple walls](javascript:launchHat3()) | |  |   The expedition was an enormous success and enhanced Hatshepsut's reputation. She became the ruler who had reached out to foreign countries and who had delivered to Egyptians marvelous wonders from far away.   **Erased from history** After 22 years of reign, Hatshepsut died and her stepson, [Tuthmosis III](http://www.pbs.org/empires/egypt/newkingdom/tuthmosis3.html), finally gained the throne that had been rightfully his for decades. Tuthmosis resented his long wait for power and was determined to make Hatshepsut pay. He wanted to wipe her from history so that Egyptians would forget that she had ever ruled.   In a massive operation, he ordered that her name and image be removed from every part of Egypt. He was so successful that Hatshepsut was totally erased from Egyptian history until 1903, when British archaeologist Howard Carter found her tomb and her story was rediscovered for the first time in 3,500 years. |